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COMMON WORDS IN SPANISH

No problem is more perplexing to the teacher of Spanish than the choice of vocabulary for class-room exercise and drill. For our aim must be to provide our students with a certain minimum of essential words, upon which as a foundation the individual student may build the specialized vocabulary required by his particular use of the language. The problem is the more complicated because the possible uses of Spanish are many; our basic vocabulary must serve alike for him whose use of the language will be only through the printed page and for him who will need it as a means of communication.

It is obvious that the vocabulary of literature is far removed from that of daily speech. And within each of these divisions there is again infinite variety. There is little in common between the language of a romantic tale of Becquer and a modern realistic novel; the speech of a child is not that of an adult, nor does a sexton speak like a clergyman. But in these different types of style or speech there remains a certain element, common to all and found in the most frequent use in all. These are naturally the names of certain objects, actions, relations, and emotions, the qualities and aspects of things, which are common to humanity. Our problem is to identify these common words.

To investigate the vocabulary of actual speech is almost impossible; only by the use of a concealed dictaphone could we hope to secure a record of unguarded conversation and even thus we should be unable to catch the speech of those who talk by the way. The study of the printed word is much simpler, but here the difficulty is that so much of literature is foreign to speech. The only literary types which offer an approximation to the spoken language of every day are the prose drama and the dialogued novel. In them we have a record, if not of the humble, homely speech of the household, at least of the average speech of modern life. They must be the primary source upon which a study of common words is based.

The present list of words is an essay in this type of study. It makes no pretense to being authoritative or canonical; to achieve that it would be necessary to check several hundred texts instead

of a few score. It does not boast of giving the "commonest" words, but merely proposes to list words which are in frequent usage. To emphasize the relative frequency, it is divided into eight sections, arranged in order of frequency. The words in List I were found in at least 80% of all texts studied; those in List II in at least 66.7%; those in List IV in at least 50%; those in List VI in at least 40%; and those in List VIII in at least 33.3%. This division must not be considered as having great significance. The fact that a word occurs in List II is no certain evidence that it is more common than one appearing in List III; but it is probable that a word in List I is more common than one in List VI or VIII.

Certain types of words are not included; they are: pronouns and pronominal adjectives; cardinal numbers; names of the days of the week, months, seasons, etc.; proper nouns; adverbs in *-mente* (except *inmediatamente*). Most of these words are conveniently to be learned in lists in grammars; there can be no doubt of their common use. In general each word is entered in the category to which it normally belongs, even though it may also be used as another part of speech; thus *corriente* is entered as an adjective, though it is also used as a noun. Certain verbs used as nouns and certain adjectives or other words used as adverbs are entered in both lists, according to their relative usage. Adjectives and adverbs having both a relative and an accented interrogative form are entered only in the relative form.

From a study of these lists certain interesting observations may be made. First of all, the proportion of the different parts of speech is of interest:

List	Nouns	Verbs	Adjs.	Advs.	Preps.	Conjs.	Excls.	Total
I.	50	61	29	29	10	6	—	185
II.	52	62	28	17	2	5	1	167
III.	68	45	25	12	3	—	—	153
IV.	70	51	26	2	2	—	2	153
V.	68	72	26	—	1	—	2	169
VI.	52	40	24	2	—	1	1	120
VII.	85	30	31	5	1	—	2	154
VIII.	101	78	36	4	—	—	2	221
	546	439	225	71	19	12	10	1322

The percentages of the total number of words for each part of speech in different groups are:

List	Nouns	Verbs	Adjs.	Advs.	Preps.	Conjs.	Excls.	Words
I—II.	29.0	34.9	16.2	13.1	3.4	3.1	.3	352
I—IV.	36.5	33.3	16.4	9.1	2.5	1.7	.5	658
I—VI.	38.0	35.0	16.7	6.5	1.9	1.2	.7	947
I—VIII.	41.3	33.2	17.0	5.4	1.4	.9	.8	1322

These percentages are almost identical with those shown by Professor Bierwirth's list of "The Commonest Words in German," a list of 740 words (slightly greater than the total of Lists I-IV), in which the percentages for nouns, verbs, and adjectives are 36.5, 36.5, 16.2. It would seem that in a list of 1,000 words, the proportion of the several parts of speech would be roughly as follows: 385 nouns, 345 verbs, 165 adjectives, 65 adverbs, and 40 prepositions, etc.

Equally noteworthy is the order of frequency in the different parts of speech. In Lists I-II, comprising 352 words, the verbs predominate over the nouns; in the later lists the number of nouns increases rapidly, while the proportion of verbs remains about the same, nearly one third of the total. The increase in nouns is such that it seems probable that a list of 2,000 words would contain at least 50% nouns. The proportion of adjectives, roughly one sixth of the total, increases slightly. Practically all of the adverbs and prepositions are found in the first four lists (658 words) and 11 of the 12 conjunctions occur in the first two lists.

Coming now to the content of the lists, it will be noted that almost all the nouns of time and of personal relationship occur in the first lists. As might be expected, the number of general and generic nouns is large, that of specific nouns is small. But a study of different types of words, such as those concerning the house, the body, clothing, the community, traveling, and the like, shows that enough are included to provide for normal conversation. It is interesting to find that the only specific flower included is *rosa;* that the commonest metals are *oro, hierro,* and *plata;* that the only animals occurring are *toro, caballo, pájaro,* and *perro*; that of food and drink we have only *agua, café, pan, chocolate, vino, carne, leche* and *miel.* The large number of abstract nouns reveals the Spanish tendency to express emotion substantively rather than adjectively. If any general conclusion can be drawn it is that in our present teaching we often lay too great stress upon the acquisition of a detailed vocabulary, to the neglect of the more widely useful general words.

In the lists of verbs, the most noteworthy fact is that all the irregular verbs, except *valer, caber,* and those in *-ducir* and *-uir,* (*asir* does not enter these lists), are found in List I. In the same list are examples of all the radical-changing verbs, of almost all the verbs showing a change in spelling of the stem, and verbs of the *-ecer* type. It is clear that a knowledge of the irregularities of Spanish conjugation is the first essential to a use of the language. There is, however, no example of a verb with stem ending in *-ll,* and only one example, *reñir,* of a verb with a stem in *-ñ.* In another respect the lists are valuable, in that they help to answer the question as to the relative frequency of certain synonyms. Thus we find that *empezar* (List I) is the only verb found for "begin"; that *encontrar* (List I) is more frequent than *hallar* (List III); and that *ocurrir* and *suceder* are the words for "happen," and not *acaecer* or *acontecer,* which do not appear in the lists. It is unnecessary to cite further examples, but it is at once clear that the lists are of value in guiding the teacher both in the choice of paradigms for drill and in the choice of vocabulary for expression.

Of the other parts of speech in the lists little need be said. The adjectives include a not inconsiderable number of mental and moral attributes as well as physical or quantitative. Of the colors only *blanco, negro* (if they be colors), *azul, verde* and *colorado* occur. The relative infrequency of the conjunction *mas* is clear. The adoption of the exclamation *caramba* by magazine-writers seeking to give Spanish color to their tales would seem to have some slight warrant.

These brief comments will serve to show some of the uses to which these lists may be put. They do not, as has been said already, claim authority, but are rather a suggestion of what might and should be done on a more extensive scale. They are at least unbiased by the personal opinions of the compiler; the texts studied were chosen with the aim of securing as normal a vocabulary as possible, from plays in the most part, but also from newspapers, reviews, short stories and novels. They will serve their purpose if they stimulate some teacher or student to complete the task which is here outlined. When such an authoritative list is available, there will be less excuse for the perverted vocabularies which now mar so many of our Spanish grammars, composition-books, and readers.

I. NOUNS

agua	chico,-a	hijo,-a	mundo	razón
amigo,-a	día	hombre	niño,-a	señor,-ra
año	Dios	hora	noche	tarde
calle	don, doña	lado	ojo	tiempo
camino	esposo,-a	madre	padre	tierra
carta	falta	mano	palabra	tío,-a
casa	fin	mañana	papel	trabajo
caso	gente	modo	parte	verdad
cosa	gracia(s)	momento	puerta	vez
cuidado	hermano,-a	mujer	rato	vida

VERBS

acabar	encontrar(se)	llevar	poner	ser
andar	entrar	mandar	preguntar	servir(se)
buscar	esperar	marchar(se)	quedar(se)	subir
caer	estar	meter(se)	querer	tener
coger	faltar	mirar	quitar	tomar
comprender	gustar	morir(se)	recordar	traer
conocer	haber	negar	reír(se)	venir
creer	hablar	oír	saber	ver
dar	hacer	parecer(se)	sacar	volver
deber	ir(se)	pasar	salir	
decir	levantar(se)	pedir	seguir	
dejar	llamar(se)	pensar	sentar(se)	
empezar	llegar	poder	sentir	

ADJECTIVES

alguno	derecho	medio	otro	tal
bueno	grande	mejor	pobre	tanto
cada	hermoso	mismo	poco	todo
cierto	juntos	mucho	primero	único
claro	largo	ninguno	rico	viejo
cualquiera	malo	nuevo	solo	

ADVERBS

ahora	como	hoy	no	sólo
allí	cuando	luego	nunca	también
antes	delante	mal	pronto	tan
aquí	dentro	más	pues	todavía
así	después	menos	sí	ya
bien	entonces	muy	siempre	

PREPOSITIONS

a	de	en	para	sin
con	desde	entre	por	sobre

CONJUNCTIONS

ni	porque	si
pero	que	y

II. NOUNS

aire	clase	frente	mozo,-a	sitio
alma	coche	fuerza(s)	muchacho,-a	sobrino,-a
amor	corazón	gana(s)	nombre	sol
asunto	cuarto	gusto	novio,-a	sombrero
brazo	cuerpo	idea	orden	sueño
caballero	dinero	instante	paso	suerte
cabeza	duda	luz	persona	viaje
cabo	edad	manera	pie	vuelta
cambio	estado	marido	pueblo	
cara	familia	mes	punto	
carácter	favor	motivo	señorita	

VERBS

abrir	casar(se)	empeñar(se)	molestar	romper
acercar(se)	colocar	enseñar	necesitar	saludar
acompañar	comer	entender	ocurrir	suceder
advertir	comprar	enterar(se)	ofrecer(se)	suponer
agradecer	contar	escribir	olvidar(se)	tirar
alegrarse	convenir	estudiar	pagar	trabajar
atreverse	correr	explicar	parar(se)	tratar
bastar	costar	figurar(se)	perder	valer(se)
besar	desear	guardar	permitir	vestir
callar(se)	detener(se)	importar	preferir	vivir
cambiar	disponer(se)	jugar	preparar	
cansar	dormir(se)	leer	presentar	
cantar	echar(se)	matar	recibir	

ADJECTIVES

alto	fácil	joven	pasado	seguro
blanco	feliz	justo	peor	tonto
bonito	feo	lleno	pequeño	último
contrario	frío	mayor	posible	verdadero
cuanto	igual	natural	raro	
dulce	izquierdo	negro	segundo	

ADVERBS

abajo	anoche	demasiado	mañana	temprano
además	aun	donde	seguida, en —	
ahí	bastante	embargo, sin —	supuesto, por —	
allá	casi	encima	tampoco	

PREPOSITIONS

hasta	según

CONJUNCTIONS

aunque	conque	mientras	o	sino

EXCLAMATIONS

adiós

III. NOUNS

acuerdo	dolor	matrimonio	paseo	santo,-a
alegría	efecto	médico	paz	semana
atención	escalera	memoria	pensamiento	señorito
boca	flor	mesa	periódico	silencio
cama	fondo	miedo	peseta	suelo
campo	golpe	negocio	piso	teatro
capital	guerra	noticia	primo,-a	toro
cielo	habitación	novedad	propósito	traje
confianza	historia	número	prueba	ventana
criado,-a	labio	obra	relación	visita
cuenta	lástima	ocasión	remedio	vista
cuestión	letra	oro	resultado	voz
culpa	libro	pañuelo	sala	
demonio	lugar	par	salud	

VERBS

aceptar	conservar	dudar	lograr	probar
acordarse	contestar	engañar	merecer	quejarse
almorzar	continuar	enviar	mover(se)	repetir
asegurar	convencer	equivocarse	hacer	retirar(se)
asomar	decidir	fijar(se)	obligar	soler
bajar	despedir(se)	ganar	observar	sufrir
caber	dirigir(se)	gastar	pasear(se)	tardar
cerrar	dispensar	hallar(se)	pegar	unir(se)
concluir	divertir(se)	juzgar	perdonar	usar

ADJECTIVES

alegre	contento	fino	magnífico	público
antiguo	duro	fresco	particular	querido
bajo	enfermo	fuerte	perfecto	siguiente
capaz	extraño	imposible	presente	tranquilo
completo	fijo	loco	propio	vario(s)

ADVERBS

acá	apenas	fuera	siquiera
acaso	ayer	lejos	tarde
adelante	cerca	quizá(s)	veras, de —

PREPOSITIONS

bajo	hacia	junto a

IV. NOUNS

acción	compañía	frase	mar	prisa
acto	conversación	genio	movimiento	real
afición	correo	gesto	música	recuerdo
amistad	daño	grito	necesidad	respeto
beso	deber	hecho	nube	ruido
billete	desgracia	intención	país	sentido

bolsillo	diablo	interés	pan	sentimiento
café	duro	jardín	pared	servidor,-ra
caja	ejemplo	juego	pedazo	silla
calor	escena	juicio	peligro	situación
carrera	espalda(s)	justicia	pelo	sorpresa
color	espíritu	libertad	pena	término
comedor	fiesta	luna	permiso	tono
compañero,-a	fortuna	maestro,-a	piedra	tren

VERBS

aburrirse	colgar	descuidar	lucir	responder
acertar	complacer	despertar(se)	llorar	resultar
adquirir	componer	distraer(se)	oponer(se)	reunir(se)
aguardar	conceder	dominar	prestar	separar(se)
animar	conseguir	durar	pretender	sorprender
anunciar	considerar	elegir	producir	sostener
aprovechar(se)	corresponder	encargar	proponer	visitar
arreglar	cuidar	entregar	recoger	
asustar	cumplir	escuchar	reparar	
atender	curar	evitar	representar	
avisar	descubrir	gozar	respirar	

ADJECTIVES

absoluto	demás	general	precioso	triste
ambos	diario	gordo	preciso	vivo
azul	difícil	gracioso	principal	
bendito	entero	inútil	puro	
corto	firme	libre	sencillo	
débil	franco	obscuro	serio	

ADVERBS

arriba	detrás

PREPOSITIONS

contra	durante

EXCLAMATIONS

ay	hola

V. NOUNS

baile	costumbre	expresión	paciencia	salida
banco	cura	género	pájaro	servicio
bondad	curiosidad	gloria	pantalón	siglo
broma	chocolate	honor	personaje	soltero,-a
caballo	dedo	huesped	peso	tienda
cantidad	deseo	iglesia	plato	valor
causa	despacho	ley	plaza	vecino,-a
céntimo	disgusto	locura	porvenir	vergüenza
ciencia	disparate	llave	pregunta	vestido
circunstancia	disposición	mamá	realidad	vino

comedia	dueño	mentira	recurso	virtud
conciencia	dulzura	mueble(s)	reloj	viudo,-a
condición	espejo	muerte	risa	
consecuencia	estación	opinión	ropa	

VERBS

abrazar	ayudar	devolver	librar	reñir(se)
aconsejar	beber	distinguir	llenar	reservar
acostumbrar	ceder	establecer	mezclar	respetar
acudir	celebrar	estimar	notar	rogar
adelantar	cesar	extrañar(se)	ocultar	saltar
adivinar	cobrar	fiar	opinar	satisfacer
agradar	confesar	fingir	padecer	significar
ahorrar	confiar	firmar	partir	soltar
alcanzar	consentir	formar	picar	sonar
amar	consultar	gritar	pintar	soñar
aparecer	cortar	imaginar(se)	prometer	temer
apoyar	cruzar	impedir	proporcionar	terminar
aprender	declarar	indicar	reconocer	
armar	descansar	inspirar	recorrer	
arrojar	desesperarse	interesar	referir	

ADJECTIVES

admirable	delicado	grave	menor	resuelto
amable	desgraciado	guapo	necesario	suave
brillante	dichoso	humano	probable	
cariñoso	dispuesto	interior	próximo	
común	enamorado	ligero	quieto	
conforme	excelente	maldito	regular	

PREPOSITIONS

acerca de

EXCLAMATIONS

ah ea

VI. NOUNS

afán	casualidad	esperanza	ilusión	rostro
ama	centro	extremo	inconveniente	sangre
ángel	consejo(s)	falda	lujo	satisfacción
animal	consideración	figura	minuto	señas
ánimo	corte	fonda	mirada	sombra
arte	criatura	forma	mitad	título
atrocidad	dirección	fuego	moda	virgen
boda(s)	empeño	gobierno	perro,-a	voluntad
cargo	encargo	hoja	pluma	
cariño	enemigo,-a	humor	presencia	
carne	esfuerzo	ideal	renta	

VERBS

abandonar	asistir	educar	incomodar	rezar
acostar(se)	averiguar	emplear	interrumpir	salvar
afirmar	cargar	encender	invitar	señalar
alejar(se)	compadecer	escapar(se)	mudar(se)	sobrar
añadir	comprometer	exclamar	pertenecer	suspirar
apartar	conducir	exigir	procurar	tapar
apuntar	consistir	fumar	regalar	temblar
arrancar	contener	ignorar	resolver	tranquilizar

ADJECTIVES

actual	digno	infeliz	lindo	real
ajeno	enorme	inmenso	modesto	sano
ancho	extranjero	inocente	noble	semejante
ciego	horrible	íntimo	notable	verde
constante	importante	limpio	pícaro	

ADVERBS

aparte	inmediatamente

CONJUNCTIONS

mas

EXCLAMATIONS

eh

VII. NOUNS

alcoba	distancia	hilo	nota	recado
amo	docena	hombro	oído	regalo
apuro	edificio	hotel	operación	resolución
árbol	ejercicio	hueso	papá	resto
artículo	elección	humo	pariente	rincón
asiento	enfermedad	impresión	pecho	secreto
aspecto	época	jefe	pesar	sistema
balcón	especie	lección	pico	sociedad
cabello(s)	esquina	leche	pieza	sudor
calidad	estilo	lengua	placer	sujeto
calma	estómago	madera	plata	tarjeta
camisa	ferrocarril	marcha	posición	tipo
comida	fuente	miel	pozo	tristeza
concepto	guardia	misa	precio	uso
contestación	hacienda	modelo	principio	vaso
cuadro	hambre	nariz	provincia	vía
curso	hierro	naturaleza	puesto	vicio

VERBS

acomodar	bailar	discutir	expresar	proceder
aguantar	carecer	emprender	nombrar	renunciar
alimentar	contentar	encerrar	ofender	replicar

alzar	convidar	entretener	participar	resistir
amenazar	crecer	entusiasmar	permanecer	suplicar
apreciar	demostrar	envolver	poseer	variar

ADJECTIVES

aficionado	elegante	formal	nervioso	santo
barato	eterno	generoso	oportuno	seco
breve	exacto	infinito	pálido	simpático
caro	expresivo	inquieto	parecido	superior
corriente	extraordinario	listo	redondo	terrible
decente	falso	moral	ridículo	vacío
				vano

ADJECTIVES

adentro	consiguiente, por —	despacio	jamás	visto, por lo —

PREPOSITIONS

ante

EXCLAMATIONS

caramba ojalá

VIII. NOUNS

abuelo,-a	cigarillo	educación	milagro	raíz
acera	cigarro	empresa	ministerio	rayo
actitud	ciudad	encanto	objeto	reina
admiración	cocina	equivocación	obligación	retrato
amante	colegio	estudio	oración	rey
angustia	conducta	éxito	paño	rosa
apellido	conocimiento	franqueza	partido	sacrificio
arreglo	contrariedad	gabinete	pasión	señal
artista	copa	grupo	perdón	sonrisa
ausencia	corbata	importancia	perla	suegro,-a
autor	cristal	juguete	pierna	suspiro
autoridad	cruz	lágrima	plan	susto
aviso	cualidad	línea	población	talle
belleza	cuello	lucha	política	techo
bolsa	declaración	llegada	polvo	temor
bota	desengaño	manga	pretexto	tiro
burla	destino	máquina	promesa	tontería
butaca	dicha	mayoría	provecho	trato
canto	diente	medida	proyecto	traza
capricho	dificultad	mérito	rabia	ventaja
				viajero

VERBS

admirar	citar	examinar	oler	rodear
admitir	comunicar	excusar	ordenar	sacrificar
adorar	constar	existir	preocupar	sacudir
ahorrar	construir	extender	prevenir	solicitar
alabar	contemplar	fundar	privar	sonreír(se)
anochecer	cubrir	huir	prohibir	sospechar
aplicar	chocar	imitar	proteger	torcer
apresurar	dedicar	imponer	protestar	tragar
arder	defender	imprimir	quemar	trasladar
arrastrar	despachar	insistir	realizar	tropezar
arrepentirse	destruir	lanzar	recomendar	vacilar
asombrar	disgustar	lavar	reducir	vencer
atar	empujar	limpiar	regresar	viajar
atravesar	enfadar(se)	manifestar	remediar	volar
calmar	escoger	montar	revelar	
causar	estrechar	obedecer	robar	

ADJECTIVES

afortunado	discreto	fiel	lejano	secreto
agradable	distinto	forzoso	ordinario	simple
caliente	divino	futuro	pesado	solemne
colorado	encantador	grato	profundo	tercero
continuo	estrecho	hondo	rápido	torpe
desconocido	exterior	indiferente	religioso	urgente
diferente	famoso	indudable	respetable	útil
				vulgar

ADVERBS

adonde	alrededor	debajo	enfrente

EXCLAMATIONS

abur	Jesús

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